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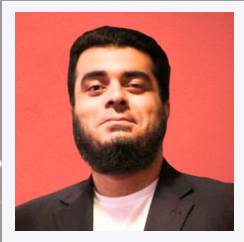


Istikharah

Made Easy

MOHAMMAD ZAHID MATEEN

THE AUTHOR



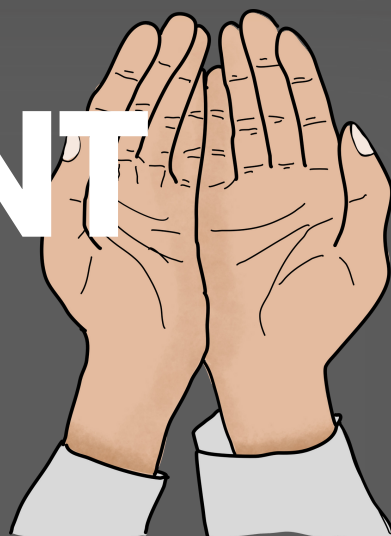
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Zahid is the Group Product Manager at Ethis.co. He is a Certified Shariah Auditor and Advisor (CSAA). He is also a Certified Project Management Professional (PMP), Certified Blockchain Associate (KBA), Certified in Zakat Management (IIIBF), and Certified in Waqf Management (IIIBF). He holds a Masters in Information Technology (MIT) with a focus on IT Project Management (IIUM). He is the founder of InkOfFaith.com which aims to revive the spirit of reading and Islamic learning among the youth. He has been active in the field of dawah for over a decade now. He is also a student of the Islamic Sciences under the tutelage and guidance of Sheikh Dr. Ibrahim Nuhu and other scholars.



CONTENT



- Introduction
- The Supplication
- When To Do Istikharah
- Praying Istikharah During Prohibited Times
- When To Recite The Dua
- The Myth of Dreams and Visions
- Dreams Are of Three Types
- Istikharah for Marriage
- Shorter Istikharah Dua
- Don't Give Up Hope
- The Essence of Istikharah: Tawheed

Introduction

The word istikharah is derived from the word 'khayr' (خير) which means goodness. The addition of alif, sin and ta' changes its meaning. Istikhar (استخار) means asking for a choice. This is stated by Imam Ibn al-Mundhir رحمه الله in Lisan al-Arab.



Salat al-Istikharah prayer is a Sunnah which the Prophet ﷺ prescribed for anyone who wants to do an action but is hesitant about it. It is a form of submission and a plea in the Court of the King of Kings for guidance. It is a practical demonstration that one has no power and no strength of one's own.

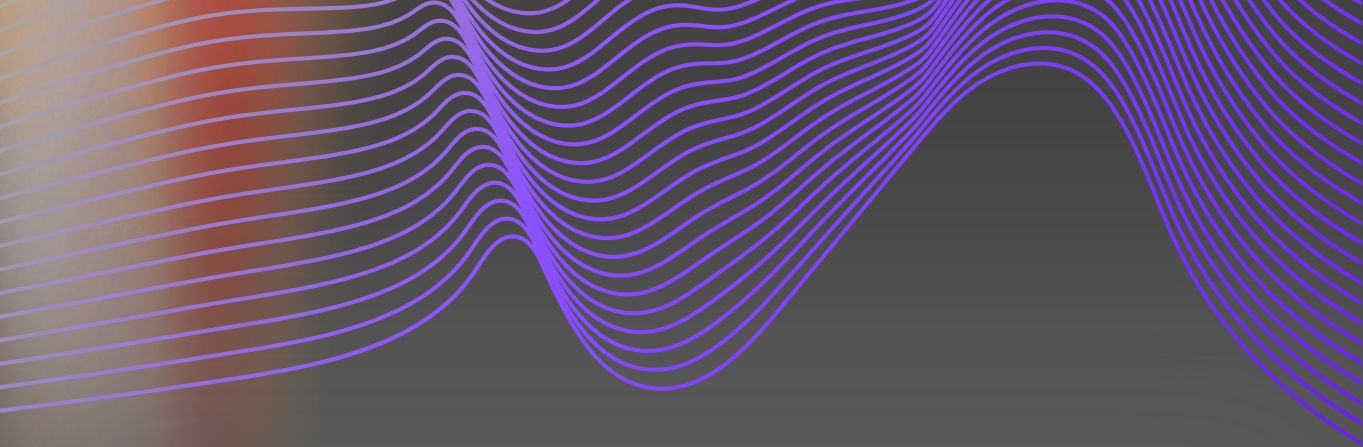
We learn about Istikharah from the hadith of Jaber ibn 'Abdullah al-Salami who said, The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to teach his Companions to make istikharah in all things, just as he used to teach them surahs from the Quran. He said: If any one of you is concerned about a decision he has to make, then let him pray two rak'ahs of non-obligatory prayer, then say:

The Supplication

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَعِينُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي - أَوْ قَالَ فِي عَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ - فَاقْدُرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي - أَوْ قَالَ فِي عَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ - فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ وَاقْدُرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ

O Allah! I ask guidance from Your knowledge, And Power from Your Might and I ask for Your great blessings. You are capable and I am not. You know and I do not and You know the unseen. O Allah! If You know that this job is good for my religion and my subsistence and in my Hereafter--(or said: If it is better for my present and later needs)--Then You ordain it for me and make it easy for me to get, And then bless me in it, and if You know that this job is harmful to me In my religion and subsistence and in the Hereafter--(or said: If it is worse for my present and later needs)--Then keep it away from me and let me be away from it. And ordain for me whatever is good for me, And make me satisfied with it.

The Prophet (ﷺ) added that then the person should name (mention) his need. [Bukhari]

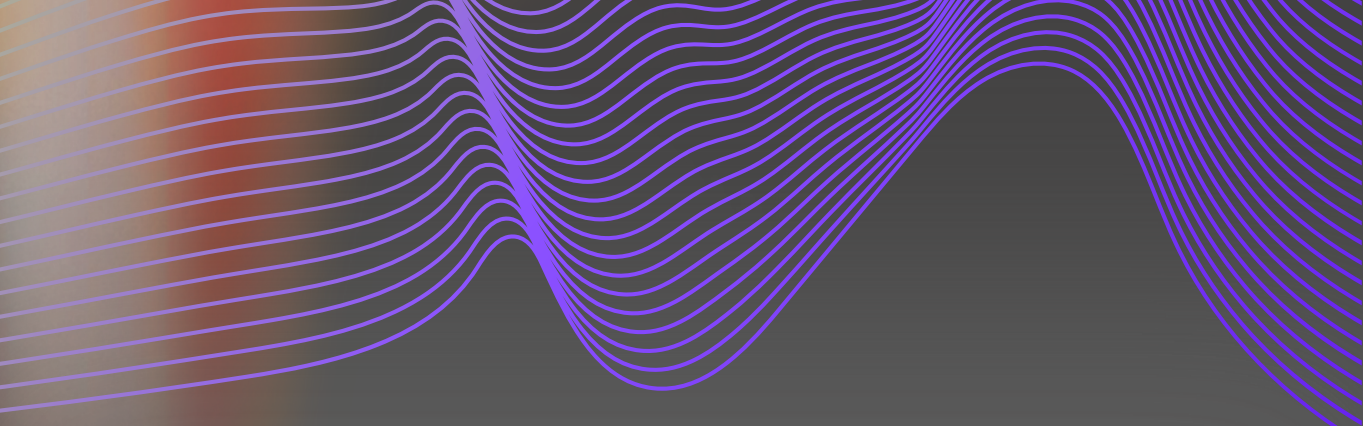


When making the dua, the actual matter or decision should be mentioned instead of the words “hathal-amra” (“this matter”).

Imam Ibn Hajar رحمه الله said, commenting on this hadith, “Istikharah is a word which means asking Allah to help one make a choice, meaning choosing the best of two things where one needs to choose one of them.

Concerning the phrase ‘The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to teach us to make istikharah in all things, Ibn Abi Jamrah said: It is a general phrase that refers to something specific. With regard to matters that are wajib (obligatory) or mustahab (liked or encouraged), there is no need for istikharah to decide whether to do them, and with regard to matters that are haram (forbidden) or makruh (disliked), there is no need for istikharah to decide whether to avoid them. The issue of istikharah is confined to matters that are mubah (allowed), or in mustahabb matters when there is a decision to be made as to which one should be given priority.

I say: it refers to both great and small matters, and probably an insignificant issue could form the groundwork for a big issue.



Imam al-Nawawi رحمه الله details the following methods in the Istikharah prayer:

1. In the first raka'ah after Surah al-Fatihah, Surah al-Kafirun is recited.
2. In the second raka'ah after Surah al-Fatihah, Surah al-Ikhlās is recited.
3. Supplicate with the supplication taught by the Prophet ﷺ or other suitable supplications. [al-Majmu']

The choice of Surah is not limited to the above. These are recommended by scholars as they show one's sincerity, need, and dependence on Allah. A person may choose to recite other ayat from the Quran as well where the context is similar. Some scholars recommend reciting Ayah 68 from Surah al-Qasas and Ayah 36 from Surah al-Ahzab among others.

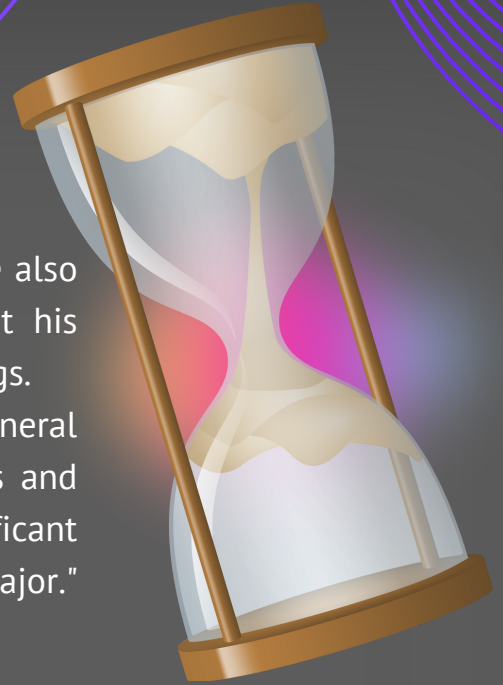
With regards to the language in which the dua is to be made, our Sheikh Ibrahim Nuhu حفظه الله advised, "It is best that the dua be made in Arabic. The person intending to do Istikharah can ask someone to write his request in the dua in Arabic and then read it off a piece of paper if needed if it cannot be memorized. The worst-case scenario is the dua can be recited in the person's mother tongue."

Istikharah is to be done by the person seeking guidance or decision. It cannot be done on behalf of another person such that the dua is outsourced to someone else. This is absolutely baseless and an innovation that incurs sins. If there is more than one person involved, then everyone involved should do their own istikharah.



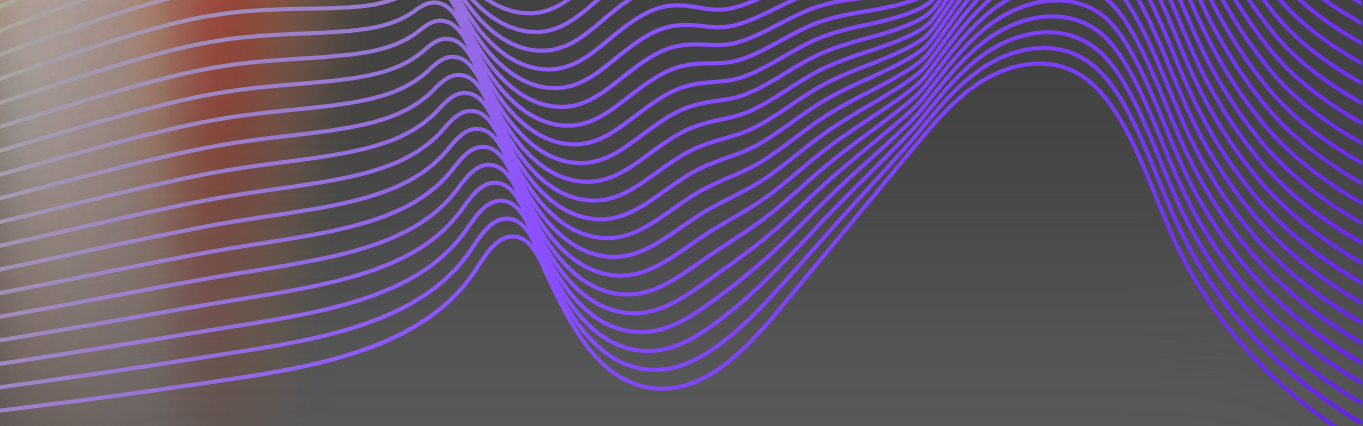
When To Do Istikharah?

The hadith of Jabir رضي الله عنه above also mentions that the Prophet ﷺ taught his companions to do Istikhara for all things. Imam Ibn Hajar رحمه الله said, "The general meaning includes both major matters and insignificant ones. Perhaps an insignificant matter may result in something major." [Fath al-Bari]



Imam Al-'Ayni رحمه الله said, "The words "in all things" are indicative of its general meaning, and that a man should not regard anything as too insignificant because it is small and not pay attention to it, and thus not pray istikharah or pray for guidance concerning it. He may regard something as insignificant but doing it or not doing it may lead to great harm. Hence the Prophet ﷺ said: "Let one of you ask his Lord even with regard to his shoelace." [Umdat al-Qaari]

But this does not mean that one goes to extremes as well. Our Sheikh, Ibrahim Nuhu حفظه الله clarified that when it comes to matters that are known to be good or bad and there is no doubt with regards to them, then there is no need to do Istikharah. There is no room for Istikharah when it comes to things that are obligatory, haram or makruh. Rather, Istikharah has to do with things that are recommended or permissible and there is an element of doubt regarding them.

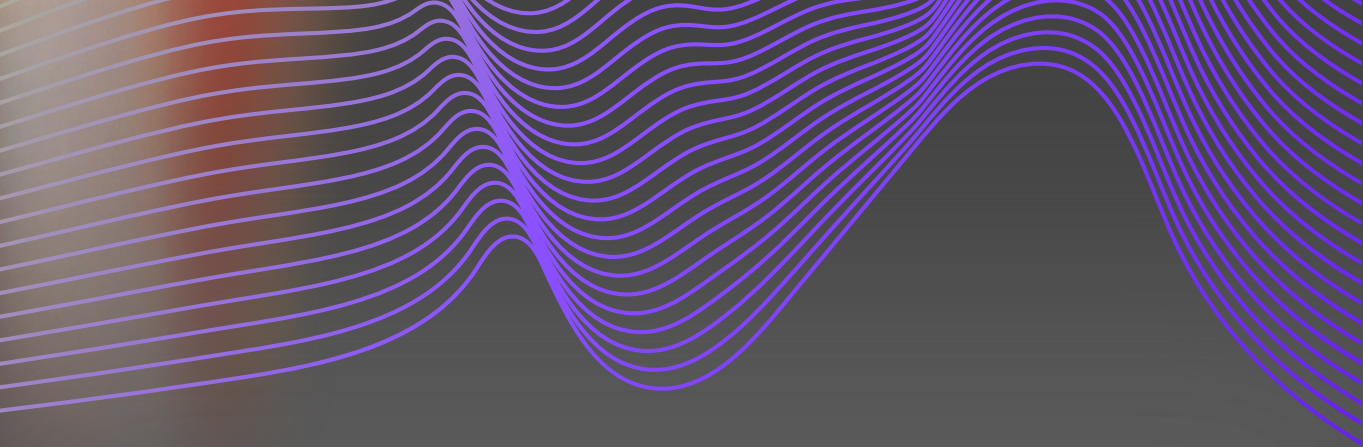


Sheikh Ibn al-Uthaymin رحمه الله explained, "Salat al-Istikharah is done when a person is thinking of something and is hesitant about the consequences, so he prays istikharah to Allah, i.e., he asks Allaah for the better of the two options: going ahead with it or not doing it.

But he should not pray istikharah with regard to everything, meaning that if a person wants to eat lunch he should say, I will pray istikharah about it, or if he wants to go and pray with the congregation in the masjid he should say, I will pray istikharah about it.

Rather he should pray istikharah and ask Allaah for guidance about things of which he does not know the consequences, such as becoming the imam of a masjid, if he is offered a position as imam of a masjid and does not know whether it is better for him to become imam or not.

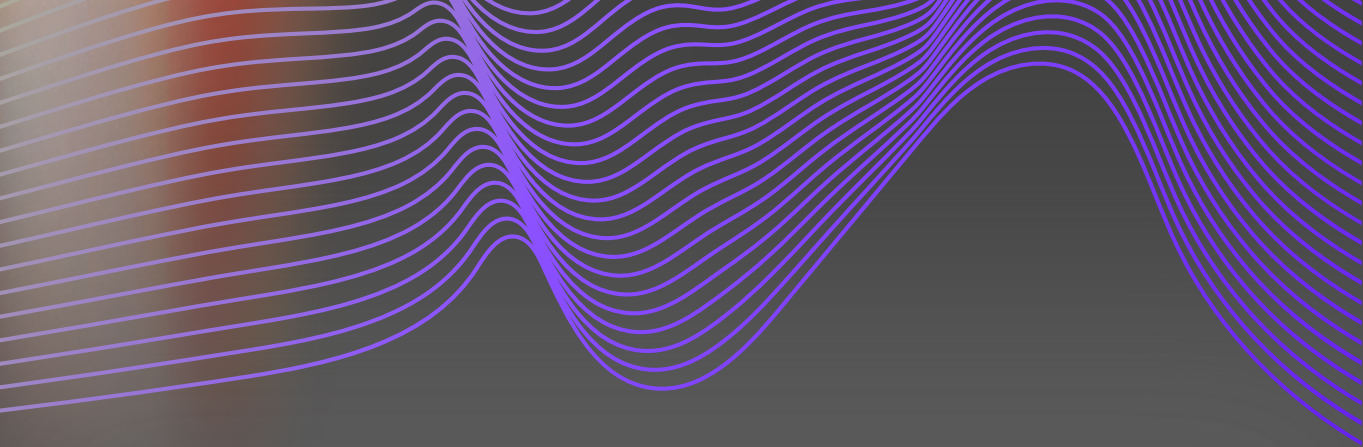
So he should pray istikharah, because being the imam is good in and of itself, **but with regard to the consequences**, he does not know whether he will be able to fulfil the duties of being imam or not, or whether he will be able to settle in this masjid or not, or whether he will be suitable for this congregation or not, so he is asking for guidance about becoming an imam with regard to whether it is good; rather he is praying for guidance as to whether it is better in terms of consequences.



How often does a man become imam of a masjid when he gets tired and does not do his duty, and problems with the congregation make him wish that he had not become an imam? The same applies to marrying a righteous woman; he does not know what the consequences will be. What matters is that in all cases where you are hesitant or uncertain, you must turn to Allah and ask Him for the better of the two options."

Istishara before Istikharah: A person should do shoura aka consultation before doing istikharah. Why before and not after? It would be bad manners with Allah that we ask Allah for aid in a matter and then go around asking the creation for guidance on the same. So one should do their consultation, get all the information and then do istikharah at the end.

Imam al-Nawawi رحمه الله said, "It is mustahab, before praying istikharah, to consult someone (about your need) whom you knows is sincere, caring and has the experience, and who is trustworthy with regard to his religious commitment and knowledge. Allah says: "and consult them in the affairs". [Surah Aal Imran, 159]



Sheikh Muhammad bin Umar Bazmool رحمه الله said, "That al-Istikharah is not done when a person is uncertain about the matter at hand; because the Prophet ﷺ said: 'If any of you intends to undertake a matter' and that the whole of the dua indicates to this point. So if a Muslim is uncertain about a matter, and he intends to pray al-Istikharah, then he should make a choice between the two matters and then pray al-Istikharah, and then after al-Istikharah, he executes that matter, and if it was good then Allah will make it easy for him and bless him in that, and if it was not good for him, then Allah turns it away from him and makes easy for him that in which it is good by the permission of Allah."

There is no set time period for Salat al-Istikharah; it is permissible to repeat it more than once, but there is no limit to how many times. Imam Badr ad-Deen al-'Ayni رحمه الله said, "If you say: Can a person pray istikharah repeatedly concerning a single matter, if it is not clear to him what the right option is, whether to do a thing or refrain from it, so long as his heart is not open to what he should do? I say: Yes indeed; it is mustahabb to repeatedly pray and offer supplication (dua) concerning that." [Umdat al-Qaari]

Praying Istikharah During Prohibited Times

It is narrated that it is forbidden to pray any form of prayer after Fajr prayer until the sun has risen above the horizon to the height of a spear, at the time of noon when the sun is at its zenith, and after the time of 'Asr until the sun is fully set. The Prophet ﷺ further told us that the sun rises and sets between the two horns of a devil, at which time the kuffar prostrate to it. These are the prohibited times of prayer.

When To Recite The Dua?

The Dua of Istikharah:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ، وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ [add decision here] خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاقْدُرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ، وَاقْدُرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ

The majority of the scholars including the Hanafis, Malikis, Shafa'is and Hanbalis stated that the dua should be recited immediately after the prayer. This is in accordance with what was stated in the hadith narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. [al-Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah]



This is because the Prophet ﷺ said: “If any one of you is concerned about a decision he has to make, then let him pray two rak’ahs of non-obligatory prayer, then say: O Allah, I seek Your guidance by virtue of Your knowledge...)” - This indicates that the dua’ should come after saying the salam at the end of the prayer.

Another opinion and this is the preferred opinion of our teachers is to make the dua just before the tasleem and finish off the prayer. This befits the state of the one who is praying, for he is facing his Lord and conversing with Him so long as he is praying. When he says the salam, that conversation comes to a close and he is no longer standing before Him and close to Him. The parable of this is when a poor person is standing before the King and the King is asking him to state whatever his heart desires and it will be granted. But instead of asking then, the person puts forth his request after departing from the King’s Court.

Abdullah Ibn Mas’ud رضي الله عنه narrated: The Prophet ﷺ taught them the tashahhud then he said at the end: “Let him ask for whatever good things he wishes.” [Bukhari]

End of the day, both instances are fine and what matters is the quality of the dua being made and the sincerity of the one making dua. So the 2 methods are:

1. During the last tashahhud, after sending salawat upon the Prophet ﷺ, recite the Dua of Istikhara and then conclude the prayer by making salam.
2. After the completion of the prayer, raise your hands and make the Dua of Istikharah. Be in a state of humbleness, servitude, and need.





The Myth of Dreams and Visions

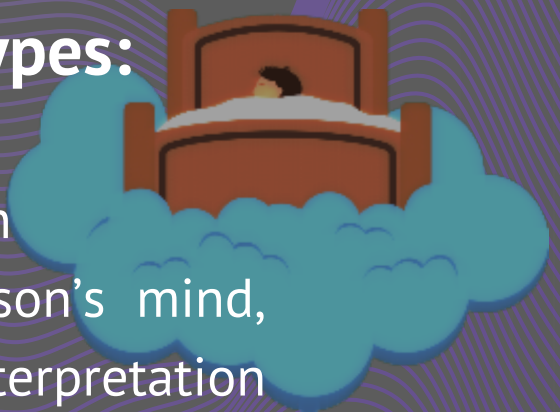
A widespread misconception is that a person should sleep after praying istikharah and then whatever good is seen in the dream indicates to move forward and something bad in the dream means to stay away. This is completely baseless and has no evidence to back it up.

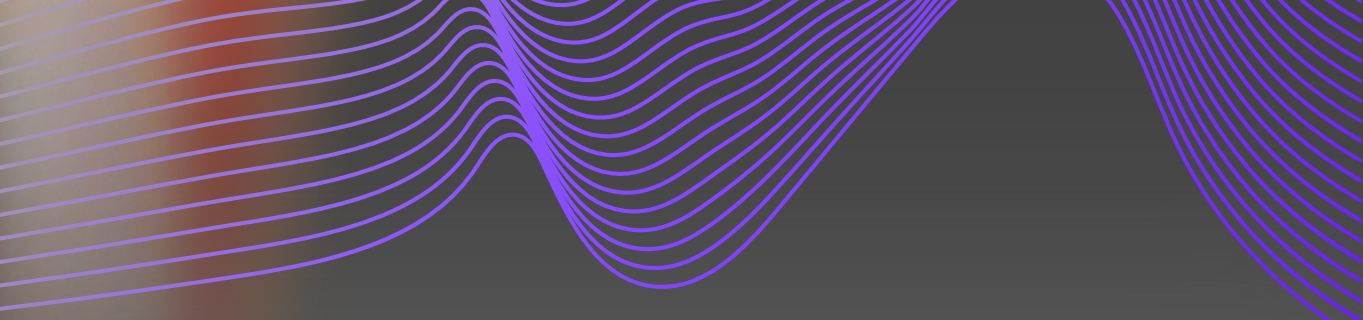
A person may or may not get dreams at all but this is not to be made a condition or linked in necessarily as a response to salat al-Istikharah. If we do get dreams. how do we deal with them?

Narrated Abu Qatada رضي الله عنه: The Prophet ﷺ said, “A good dream that comes true is from Allah, and a bad dream is from Satan, so if anyone of you sees a bad dream, he should seek refuge with Allah from Shaitan and should spit on the left, for the bad dream will not harm him.” [Bukhari]

Dreams are of 3 types:

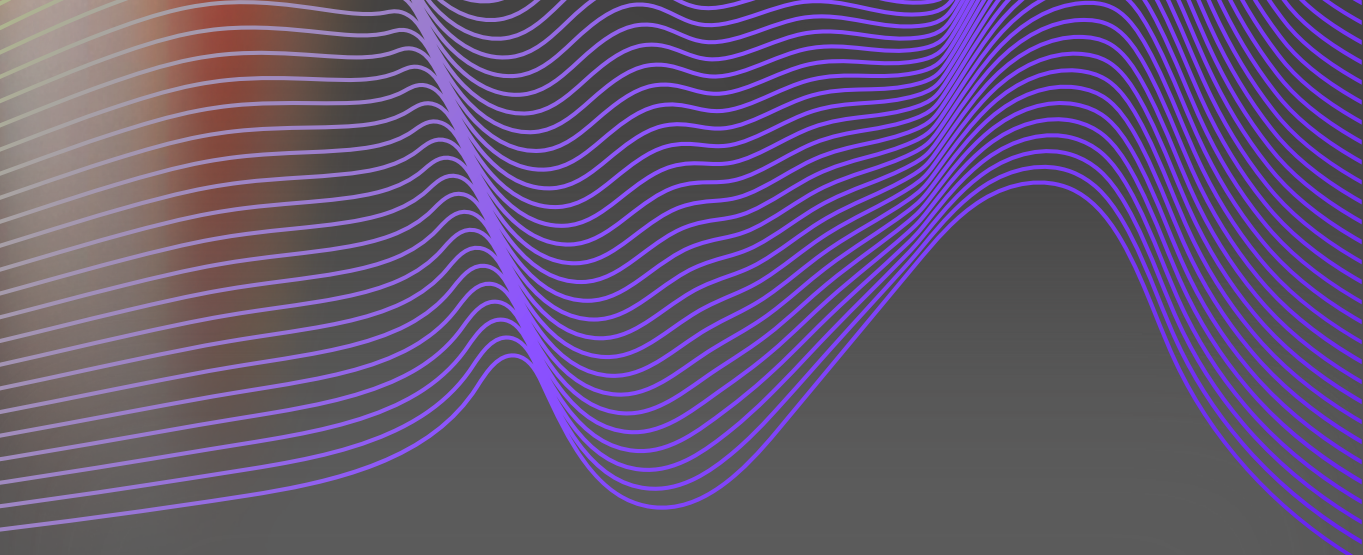
1. Those from Allah
2. Those from Shaytan
3. Those from a person's mind, experiences and interpretation of the soul.





We should be careful about how we interpret these dreams. Our Sheikh Ibrahim Nuhu حفظه الله explained, "That which is from Shaytan is what we generally call nightmares or which is completely against common sense. Another type of dream is the translation of what you're thinking about often throughout the day. Those who want to marry will see a lot of dreams. If you want to travel, you will see a lot of dreams with regard to that etc. Then there are those very straightforward dreams which you generally see just before or after Fajr. These dreams are not against common sense and could be interpreted. The Prophet ﷺ used to interpret dreams of the sahaba after Fajr.

Imam Bukhari رحمه الله has a chapter in which he prohibits people from taking their dreams to be interpreted by a person except if that person is a knowledgeable scholar and actually knows how to interpret dreams with experience or someone who really loves you and will actually tell you the truth instead of manipulating it. Telling it to others invites envy and jealousy. That is why the Prophet ﷺ taught us that if you saw a dream which you didn't like then the best thing is not to share it with anyone. Rather ask Allah to protect you from its evilness and to grant you the good from it. This is a very good principle for the evil will be avoided and only the good will come."



Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said concerning the matter of feeling happy about something: if he makes istikharah, then whatever Allaah makes him feel happy about and makes easy for him, this is what Allaah has chosen for him. [Majmu' al-Fatawa].

Imam al-Nawawi رحمه الله explained, "After performing the Istikharah, a person must do what he is wholeheartedly inclined to do and feels good about doing and should not insist on doing what he had desired to do before making the istikharah. And if his feelings change, he should leave what he had intended to do, otherwise, he is not completely leaving the choice to Allah, and would not be honest in seeking aid from Allah's power and knowledge.

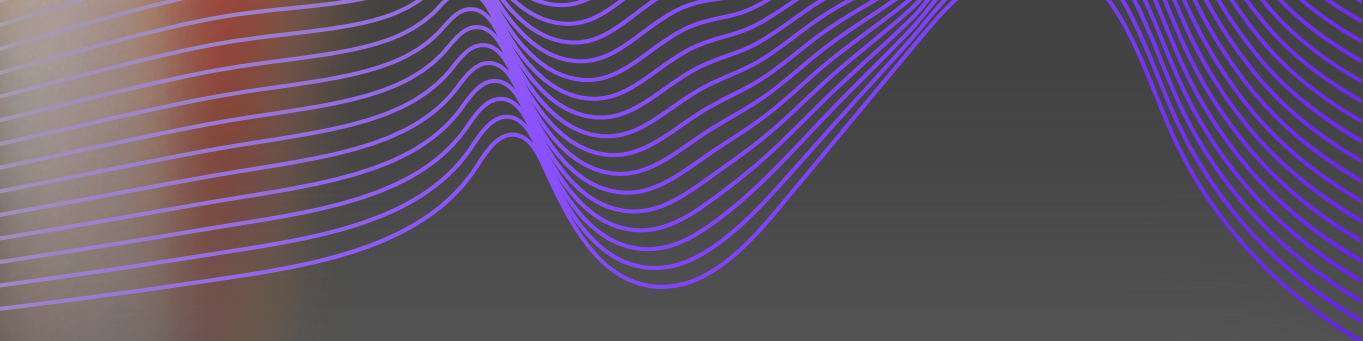
Sincerity in seeking Allah's choice means that one should completely leave what he himself had desired or determined."

Istikharah for Marriage

As highlighted before, Salat al-Istikharah is for anything and everything. It is not something limited to be done only when selecting a potential spouse. When it comes to marriage, our Sheikh Ibrahim Nuhu حفظه الله summarized it in a simple manner:



1. Look for good manners and etiquette (Adab). What's important is that a person feels comfortable in the marriage and with their spouse.
2. Look at religion as a priority for looks will soon fade. This doesn't mean that looks are not important. We are talking about priority here.
3. Do your own field research. Others don't know what you want. When they look, they'll suggest something they like that you might not like at all.
4. After all, consultations are done, turn to Allah and do Istikharah. Why at the end? It's not good adab to ask anyone else for help after you've asked Allah to decide for you.



When it comes to marriage, do not accept anyone who becomes righteous just because or for you. That righteousness is not for the sake of Allah but for the sake of the person, just so that they can marry them. If things don't go their way later on, then their true face emerges. Tell such people all the best and move on. You work at the office, because they have something you want. There is no "getting to know each other" before marriage. The person will tell you all that you might want to hear to get what they want. What you see or show there is a borrowed image of who you are. After marriage, nothing will be left hidden and the real face is exposed sooner or later.

Many a time we see that there is no respect between the spouses at all who were dating or in a relationship for years before the marriage. They break, come back, break and then again come back. They make it a joke. They already know about the other and there is nothing left to explore and grow with the spouse."

Shorter Istikharah Dua

We have another narration that teaches us the shortest form of doing Istikharah in anything and everything that we do since memorizing the larger dua might not be easy for some. Our mother Aishah narrated from Abu Bakr As-Siddiq رضي الله عنهم: Whenever the Prophet ﷺ wanted to do a matter, he would say:

اللَّهُمَّ خِزْ لِي وَاخْتَرْ لِي
**O Allah, make it good for me
and choose for me.**

[Tirmidhi]

If a person cannot offer the two rak'at because of an emergency, then it is also permissible to make the dua without the prayer. This is also applicable to women who cannot pray because of menstruation etc. Imam al-Nawawi said, "If he cannot offer the prayer then he may recite the dua of istikharah." [al-Adhkar]

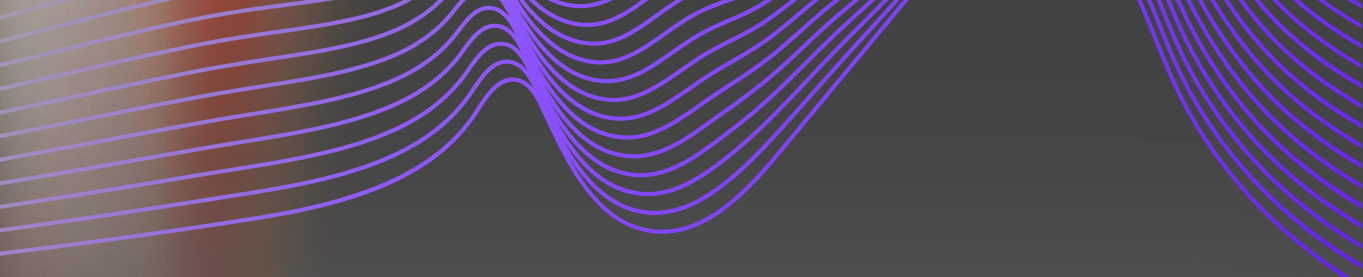
Don't Give Up Hope

Lastly, the person doing istikharah needs to be patient in terms of receiving the answer to their prayers. The Prophet ﷺ taught us, "The supplication of everyone is granted as long as he does not show haste and does not say that he made a supplication but it was not accepted." [Abu Dawud]. Our Sheikh, Ibrahim Nuhu حفظه الله said, "People make dua for some time and if they don't see anything happening, they get bored and stop making dua. Allah already Knows. Show Allah that YOU need him and you will see miracles happening in your life. Allah was, is and will always be there for us. Don't let Shaitan fool us into thinking that Allah has turned away from us. Call upon him NOW!"

At the end of the day, Allah never refuses His slave that raises his hands towards him for help. Allah out of his immense mercy and love for his believing slave:

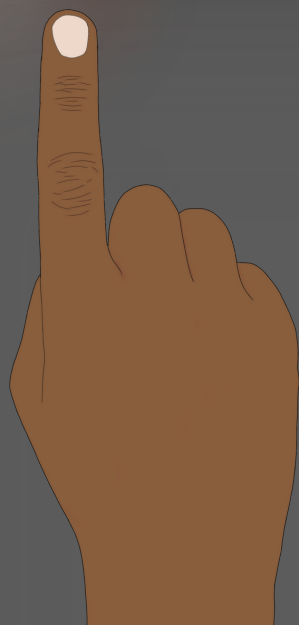
1. Answers the dua
2. Postpones the answer to replace it with something better at another time.
3. Saves the person from an impending calamity
4. Saves the dua to help and alleviate His slave on the Day of Judgement.

Salman al-Farsi رضي الله عنه narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Indeed, Allah is Shy and Beneficent. He is Shy when His servant raises his hands to Him (in a dua) to return them empty, disappointed!" [Tirmidhi]



وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ
وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

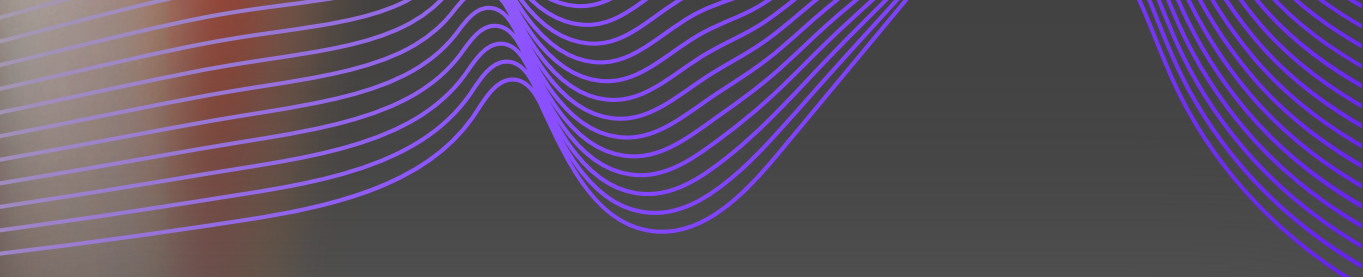
“And perhaps, you may hate something, but it is in fact good for you - And perhaps, you may love something, but it is in fact bad for you. Allah Knows but you do not know” [Surah al-Baqarah, 216]



The essence of Istikharah: Tawheed

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Amongst the happiness of the son of Adam is the abundance in performing Istikharah from Allah the exalted and contentment upon what is ordained by Allah for him. And amongst the misery of the son of Adam is his disregard for Istikharah to Allah the exalted and his resentment for what is ordained by Allah for him." [Tirmidhi]

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله said, "Allah compensated the Muslims by giving them this supplication, which is Tawheed, and it is being in need of Allah, servitude of worship, reliance upon Allah, asking the One in whose Hand is all goodness, Who Alone can turn away evil. He Alone who, if He opens up Mercy for His slave then there is none who can seclude a person from that mercy, and if He (Allah) withholds it then none can send mercy to a person whether it is using omens, astrology or lucky stars. This dua' is the good fortune for the happy person, it is good fortune for the people of happiness and success, those for whom Allaah gave them happiness before, and it is not good fortune for the people of Shirk and wretchedness, those whom associate another deity with Allah, then soon will they come to know.



This Dua includes the confirmation and testification of the existence of Allah. The confirmation and testification of His Perfect Attributes, from the perfection of Knowledge and capability and universal Will. And it includes the confirmation and testification of Allah's Lordship and entrustment of this matter to Him – and seeking aid from Him, and relying upon Him, and a person leaves the responsibility from himself and acquits himself from any capability and strength except that it is with Allah. It also includes the acknowledgement of the slave of Allah of the weakness of his knowledge and his own interests and his own capability upon these things and his desire for them, and that all of these things are in the Hand of his Guardian and his Originator and his true Lord."

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله further writes, "So the purpose of al-Istikharah is to rely upon Allah and entrustment to Him and the capability to fulfil the action with Allah's Capability, His Knowledge. And that Allah chooses good for His slave, and this is from those things which necessitate being pleased with Allah as the Lord. As a person will not taste the flavour of Iman if he does not have these things (reliance, entrustment etc), and if he is pleased with destiny after al-Istikharah then that is a sign of happiness.' [Za'ad al-Ma'ad]

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